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NEBRASKANS' EVALUATIONS OF THEIR STATE GOVERNMENT

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NEBRASKA ANNUAL SOCIAL INDICATORS SURVEY

Bureau of Sociological Research
Department of Sociology
University of Nebraska–Lincoln
Lincoln, Nebraska 68588
Telephone: (402) 472-3672

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NEBRASKANS' EVALUATIONS OF THEIR STATE GOVERNMENT

Alan Booth
Department of Sociology

Susan Welch
Political Science Department

Price: $ .50

The Nebraska Annual Social Indicators Survey

Lynn K. White: 1979 Study Director

The findings in this report are based on data collected in the third Nebraska Annual Social Indicators Survey (NASIS). This survey is part of an on-going study of the quality of life in Nebraska conducted by the Bureau of Sociological Research at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

In 1979 a representative sample of 1882 Nebraskans eighteen years of age or older living in households was interviewed by telephone. The respondents to the 1979 survey are part of a panel originally selected and interviewed in 1977 and 1978. They will be re-interviewed every two years in order to provide information on changing quality of life. The interviews averaged approximately 40 minutes and included questions about environment, health, crime, political attitudes, occupation, education, family life and other matters reflecting the quality of life experienced in the state. For the entire sample, 95 out of 100 times the percentages computed from the items asked on the survey are likely to be accurate to within plus or minus 2.3 percent of the figure that would have been obtained if each adult in Nebraska had been surveyed. This is an estimate of maximum error and for most items the percentages are likely to be even more accurate.

The data gathered by NASIS are used by a wide variety of State and local government agencies for policy and program planning and by faculty and students at the University of Nebraska and other colleges for research. No information identifying any respondent is released to any users and the strict confidentiality of individual respondents is rigidly enforced. While the final responsibility for the organization and structure of the survey and for reports produced under its name rests with the Bureau of Sociological Research, public agencies and University departments play an integral part in planning the survey through an Advisory Committee. Public organizations interested in membership on the Advisory Committee should contact the NASIS Study Director.

Funding for NASIS comes from the University of Nebraska, The Bureau of Sociological Research, and State and local agencies which buy items and data analysis from the survey.

The NASIS surveys are repeated each year to measure changes in the quality of life in Nebraska. While there is a core of questions which is included every year, each survey has a large component of unique items which address specific topical issues. Plans for future years include interviewing a new sample of Nebraskans in 1980 as well as continuing to re-interview the 1977 panel every two years to assess changes in their lives. Additional detail on the NASIS surveys regarding use of the survey data or cost of purchasing items on future surveys can be obtained by contacting Lynn K. White, NASIS Study Director, at the Bureau of Sociological Research or by sending for a copy of the 1980 NASIS Prospectus.

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How satisfied are the residents of Nebraska with the job their State government is doing? Our report, based on the results of a statewide telephone survey of adults in Nebraska, conducted in the Spring of 1979 by the Bureau of Sociological Research at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, will provide a brief answer to this question. Nineteen hundred Nebraskans from all parts of the State were randomly selected and asked to evaluate the State government. First they were asked, "In general, how satisfied are you with the job the State legislature is doing? very satisfied, satisfied, dissatisfied, very dissatisfied, or neither satisfied nor dissatisfied." The question was then asked, "How about the Governor and various State agencies? Are you very satisfied, satisfied, dissatisfied, very dissatisfied, or neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the job they are doing?" Those that reported any sort of dissatisfaction were asked, "What are you dissatisfied with?"

We asked these questions not to ascertain views toward any one specific State government official, but rather to determine the degree of support by Nebraskans for the job their State government--both the legislative and the executive branch--was doing. High levels of satisfaction by the public would certainly be one indication to State officials that they are doing a good job, at least in terms of the criterion of satisfying the public. Low levels may mean that the public believes the government should be taking different directions or behaving in a different way.

Ratings of the legislature and of the Governor and various State agencies are fairly similar: sixty-two percent report being satisfied or very satisfied with the legislature, sixty-five percent with the Governor and State agencies (Table 1). Slightly more (17 percent) reported dissatisfaction with the legislature compared with the executive branch (12 percent). The remainder of the sample said they were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the job the Governor and State agencies or legislature was doing; they had a neutral posture.

It is difficult to know if these ratings are particularly high or low. Both the Governor and his appointees and the legislature had only been in office for a few months when the poll was taken; perhaps extreme satisfaction and dissatisfaction with job performance had not yet materialized. Last year (NASIS Report #4, 1978) 47 percent rated the legislature as doing a good or excellent job, with most of the rest labeling it fair. It is possible that some who rate the legislature as only "fair" would say they are "satisfied." The recent poll of Governor Thone's performance by the Lincoln Journal and Star (October 28, 1979) found that 54 percent of a small sample of Nebraskans think he is doing an excellent or good job, This supports the suggestion that many people claim satisfaction with a job they would only rate as "fair."

Are there distinct groups in the population that are more or less likely to be satisfied with the performance of the Nebraska State government? We found (Table 2) that Republicans and Democrats, college educated and those without post high school training were equally likely to be dissatisfied with the job the legislature was doing. Education made no difference in evaluation of State agencies and the Governor either, but Republicans were, as expected, less critical of the Republican executive branch than were Democrats and Independents. Those over 60 were more critical of the legislature than were younger people, but these same differences did not appear in evaluations of the executive branch. Politically active individuals were more critical of both the legislative and executive branch than those less active; this was especially true of attitudes toward the legislature. Men were more critical of the legislature than women, but about the same percentage of both groups were critical of the Governor and State agencies. Residents of Lincoln and Omaha were more critical of the legislature than people living in smaller communities, but not more critical of the Governor and State agencies. Finally, as one might expect, those who were unemployed were much more critical of both branches of government than were the employed, retired, and others.

In sum, there are some differences among groups of Nebraskans in their evaluation of those two branches of government. The differences are more pronounced in evaluations of the legislature, though the politically active and the unemployed are more critical of both the executive and the legislative branch.

We next examined the 192 people in our sample who reported some dissatisfaction with the Governor and State agencies. Many of the complaints were not specific (26 percent). The specific complaints mentioned, and their frequency, are listed in Table 3. "Taxes are too high" was the most frequent complaint (but mentioned by less than 2 percent of the respondents); too much inefficiency and waste; welfare fraud; and the belief that government favors one set of groups at the expense of others were other complaints. Some people complained that certain groups were not getting enough government benefits. The only complaints against particular agencies were the Roads Department, for inadequate repair and maintenance of roads, and the Welfare Department. Complaints about the legislature were also found, even though the question was directed to the State executive agencies.

In sum, only a minority of Nebraskans are acutely dissatisfied with the job their State government is doing. The majority are satisfied or apathetic. Apparently, some people are satisfied even though they think the government is doing only a "fair" job. This suggests that Spring, 1979 was a time when most people did not have strong feelings about their State government. After all, it was several months after an election, and the new set of State officers had been in office only a little while. On the other hand, these attitudes may also reflect a rather "live and let live" attitude of Nebraskans toward their government. This is suggested by the fact that it is the politically inactive people who are least likely to be critical. Those who participate in politics to a greater extent are more likely to find fault with the government. And, few people gave very specific responses as to what they thought was wrong with government, making

it somewhat difficult for government officials to respond to dissatisfaction where it does exist.

TABLE 1.

SATISFACTION WITH NEBRASKA LEGISLATURE AND EXECUTIVE BRANCH

	Percent	N
In general, how satisfied are you with the job the Nebraska State Legislature is doing?		
Very satisfied	2	(36)
Satisfied	60	(1063)
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	21	(375)
Dissatisfied	14	(258)
Very dissatisfied	3	(45)
How about the Governor and various State agencies?		
Very satisfied	3	(56)
Satisfied	61	(995)
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	23	(382)
Dissatisfied	11	(172)
Very dissatisfied	2	(28)

TABLE 0.

PERCENT DISSATISFIED WITH STATE LEGISLATURE OR THE GOVERNOR AND VARIOUS STATE AGENCIES BY SUBGROUPS

Subgroups	State Legislature	Governor and State Agencies
Sex		
Male	22	12
Female	12	11
Education		
Less than high school	18	12
High school graduate	17	11
Post high school training	17	12
Age		
18 - 34	12	11
35 - 59	19	13
60 or more	23	11
Residence		
Lincoln and Omaha	24	13
Other urban	12	12
Rural - Non-farm	14	11
Rural - Farm	15	10
Home		
Own	19	13
Rent	13	10
Employment		
Working	18	12
Unemployed	41	28
Retired	22	14
In school	12	16
Keeping house	12	9
Party Affiliation		
Republican	18	9
Democrat	18	13
Independent	15	14
No preference	22	14
Political Activity in Past Two Years		
Voted	18	12
Did not vote	14	11
Attended public meeting	23	15
Did not attend public meeting	15	11
Wrote a letter to the editor	29	15
Did not write a letter to the editor	16	12
Joined a political organization	24	16
Did not join a political organization	15	11

TABLE 3.

PROBLEM AREAS MENTIONED BY PEOPLE DISSATISFIED WITH THE GOVERNOR AND STATE AGENCIES

Problem Areas	Number of Times Mentioned
Taxes too high	27
General inefficiency and waste	24
Welfare fraud	13
State group government favors one group at the exclusion of others (e.g., Out-State, self-interest)	10
University funding should be higher	10
Legislature introduces too many unimportant bills	9
Roads not repaired, maintained, and cleaned with sufficient frequency	7
Miscellaneous, such as hunting licenses fees too high, too few jobs, etc.	6
Salaries of state employees too high	5
Not coping with inflation	5
Legislature too slow to act	4
Sales tax should not be charged on food and utilities	3
Elderly receiving insufficient aid	3
Salaries of state employees too low	3
Handicapped receiving insufficient aid	1
Mentally ill receiving insufficient aid	1

List of reports already released using data gathered in the 1979 Nebraska Annual Social Indicators Survey. These may be purchased at the indicated price from the Bureau of Sociological Research of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Report Number	Title
1	Designs, Procedures, Instruments and Forms for the 1979 NASIS. Lynn K. White. Price: $7.50.
2	Taxes: Are They Fair? Susan Welch and Alan Booth. Price: $ .50.
3	Nebraska's Children -- Learning to Work. Lynn K. White and David B. Brinkerhoff. Price: $ .75.